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ABSTRACT

In this study of 99 countries, representing 2.3 billion women (92 percent of the world's female population), 20 indicators measure women's well-being in the following sectors: (1) health; (2) marriage and children; (3) education; (4) employment; and (5) social equality. Original data for each of the 20 indicators were converted mathematically to 5 point scales, giving a maximum total score of 100 points per country. Countries are ranked for each of the five sectors. General conclusions are provided about the quality of life for women worldwide for each of the five sectors. General findings include the following: (1) women in all countries aspire to have equal opportunities with men in the areas of employment, health care, and social status; (2) in no country surveyed have women achieved overall equality; (3) in over half these countries conditions for women were ranked as poor, very poor, or extremely poor; and (4) North American and Northern European countries ranked highest, while Africa, the Middle East, and South Asia ranked lowest. (BJV)

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Country Rankings of the Status of Women: Poor, Powerless, and Pregnant

Population Briefing Report Number 20

Population Crisis Committee
Washington, DC

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Population Crisis Committee

POPULATION Briefing Paper

NO. 20 JUNE 1988

Country Rankings of the Status of Women: Poor, Powerless and Pregnant

The status of women varies enormously from one part of the world to another. Nowhere do women enjoy equal status with men. But in the least developed countries of Africa, the Middle East, Asia and Latin America, crushing poverty overlaid with long-standing patterns of discrimination create living conditions for women almost too harsh to imagine for women in Western industrial countries.

The world's poorest women are not merely poor. They live on the edge of subsistence. They are economically dependent and vulnerable, politically and legally powerless. As wives and mothers they are caught in a life cycle that begins with early marriage and too often ends with death in childbirth. They work longer hours and sometimes work harder than men, but their work is typically unpaid and undervalued.

Worldwide, women grow about half the world's food, but most own no land. They are one third of the official paid workforce, but are concentrated in the lowest paid occupations. They are grossly under-represented in institutions of government. If they work outside the home, most work a double day, bearing nearly total responsibility for child care and household chores regardless of their contribution to family income.

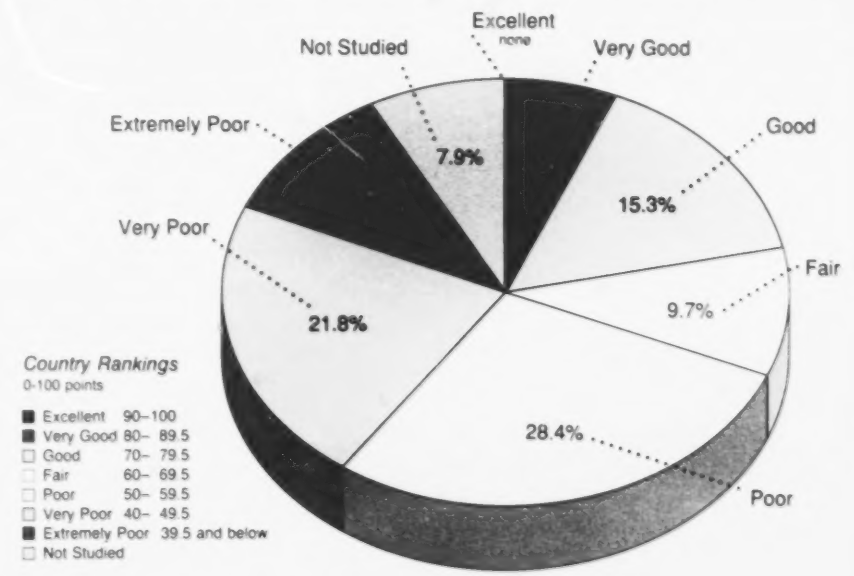
In this study of 99 countries, representing 2.3 billion women (92 percent of the world's female population), 20 indicators measure women's well-being in five sectors: health, marriage and children, education, employment, and social equality. In each area, three indicators compare women's status from country to country, for example, the percent of girls in school. A fourth measures the relative size of the gender gap within countries, for example, the difference between male and female rates of literacy.

Original data for each of the 20 indicators, collected from standard data sets, were converted mathematically to 5 point scales, giving a maximum score for each sector of 20 and a maximum total score of 100. The 20-scaled indicators for all 99 countries appear on the accompanying wall chart.

Possible scores were divided into seven overall rankings, from Excellent to Extremely Poor. Although some countries received Excellent scores in one or another sector, no total country score fell in the Excellent category (scores of 90 to 100). Only seven countries had total scores of 80 or above, giving them a rank of Very Good. Sweden, with 87, scored highest. Bangladesh, with 21.5, scored lowest.

Some 51 out of 99 countries fell into the study's three bottom categories: Poor, Very Poor and Extremely Poor. Country scores for these rankings ranged from 59.5 to 21.5. The study indicates that over 60 percent of all women and girls in the world live under conditions which threaten their health, deny them choice about childbearing, limit educational attainment, restrict

Distribution of the World's Women by Country Rankings



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economic participation, and fail to guarantee them equal rights and freedoms with men.

Not surprisingly, North America and Northern Europe dominated the top-ranked countries; Africa, the Middle East and South Asia, the bottom ranks. But there were interesting exceptions. Switzerland (which only granted women the right to vote in 1971) ranked only 24th with a score of 73. The high income oil-exporting countries of the Gulf ranked Very Poor or Extremely Poor, with scores below 50. More surprisingly, some upper middle income South American countries also ranked relatively low, like Brazil with a score of only 54.5. In contrast, a few low income countries like Sri Lanka and China scored fairly well, with scores of 60 and 58.5, respectively.

The study confirms the important links between the status of women in the five sectors. Educational attainment, for example, is related not only to employment, but to health, family size and equality in marriage. Patterns of marriage and childbearing have a similarly powerful effect on social and economic conditions for women and are in turn influenced by them. Women with greater educational and economic opportunities marry later and have closer to the number of children they want. Conversely, women whose early marriage leads to early and repeated pregnancies may be cut off from opportunities in their countries, however small, for a good education and paid employment in the modern sector.

If women are to become full partners with men in the social, economic and political development of their countries, they will need to change the age-old patterns of discrimination—present to some degree in almost every country—which have kept them second-class citizens. They will also need to gain control over that part of their lives which everywhere distinguishes most women's lives from men's lives. They must be able to decide whether and when to bear a child, and they must enlist husbands, employers and governments in meeting child care responsibilities. With the possible exception of a few industrialized countries, women in most parts of the world are getting little such help. And for half the world's women real choices about childbearing do not exist.

Score	Country
20.0	Finland
19.5	Austria
19.5	France
19.0	Australia
19.0	Belgium
19.0	Canada
19.0	Germany, West
19.0	Hungary
19.0	Italy
19.0	Netherlands
19.0	Norway
19.0	Poland
19.0	Portugal
19.0	Sweden
19.0	Switzerland
19.0	United States
18.5	Bulgaria
18.5	Chile
18.5	Costa Rica
18.5	Czechoslovakia
18.5	Denmark
18.5	Greece
18.5	Hong Kong
18.5	Ireland
18.5	Japan
18.5	New Zealand
18.5	Spain
18.5	United Kingdom
18.0	Germany, East
18.0	Singapore
18.0	Uruguay
18.0	USSR
18.0	Yugoslavia
17.5	Argentina
17.5	Barbados
17.5	Israel
17.5	Jamaica
17.5	Korea, South
17.5	Romania
17.5	Taiwan
17.0	Panama
16.5	Kuwait
16.5	Malaysia
16.5	Mexico
16.5	Trinidad & Tobago
16.5	Venezuela
16.0	Cuba
16.0	Sri Lanka
16.0	United Arab Emirates
15.5	Guyana
15.5	Paraguay
15.5	Philippines
15.5	Thailand
15.5	Tunisia
15.0	Brazil
15.0	Colombia
15.0	Ecuador
15.0	Jordan
15.0	Libya
14.5	South Africa
14.0	Algeria
14.0	China
14.0	Syria
13.5	Dominican Republic
13.5	Honduras
13.5	Saudi Arabia
13.5	Turkey
13.0	Botswana
13.0	Guatemala
13.0	Kenya
13.0	Morocco
13.0	Peru
13.0	Zimbabwe
12.5	El Salvador
12.0	Iraq
12.0	Lesotho
11.5	Indonesia
10.5	Egypt
10.5	India
10.5	Nicaragua
10.0	Bolivia
10.0	Sudan
10.0	Zambia
9.5	Liberia
9.5	Tanzania
9.0	Haiti
9.0	Senegal
8.5	Cameroon
8.0	Benin
8.0	Pakistan
8.0	Rwanda
7.0	Malawi
6.5	Mozambique
6.0	Nepal
6.0	Nigeria
6.0	Yemen, North
5.5	Bangladesh
5.5	Mali
3.5	Afghanistan

Health

Because of the considerable gap in living standards, especially nutritional status and medical care, life expectancy for both men and women in the world's richest countries is almost twice that in the world's poorest countries: about 80 years compared to about 45 years. Most differences are accounted for by very high infant mortality rates in low income countries.

In most of the world women have a longer average life expectancy than men. But differentials in male and female life expectancy are narrower in poor countries than in rich and in some cases reversed from the norm. That is, men actually have higher life expectancies than women. Such statistical anomalies indicate patterns of discrimination which give preference to male over female children early in life. They also reflect, to some degree, the very high rates of maternal mortality in poor countries (deaths due to pregnancy, childbirth and illegal abortion).

In this study three indicators were used to compare women's health status from country to country and one to compare the size of the gender gap in health. The principal data source was the International Data Base of the U.S. Bureau of the Census.

- **Female infant and child mortality,** technically infant and child mortality, is the percent of girls born who die before their fifth birthday.
- **Female mortality—childbearing years** is the percent of all women aged 15 who will die before they reach the age of 45, based on current age-specific death rates for women.
- **Female life expectancy at birth** is the average number of years a woman may expect to live at the time she is born.
- **Gender gap: female/male differential life expectancy** is the difference in years between female and male life expectancy at birth. A small differential or higher male life expectancy may indicate a gender gap in health status.

Female Infant and Child Mortality

In most highly industrialized countries, except in Eastern Europe, the study data show that at least 99 out of every 100 girls born will survive their first five years. Hong Kong, Israel, Singapore, Greece and Costa Rica also fall into this category.

In contrast, fewer than 80 out of 100 girls born in Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Mali, North Yemen and Pakistan will survive to age five. In one third of all the countries studied, less than 90 in 100 girls survive to age five. In these countries male infant and child mortality is also high.

Most of the 15 million children under age five who die every year could be saved through simple medical interventions and preventive health measures, such as nutritional monitoring, immunization, better hygiene, safe drinking water, and better birth spacing.

Women's Status in Highest and Lowest Ranked Countries

In Sweden . . . *(Population: 8.4 million, Area: 173,730 square miles)*	In Bangladesh . . . *(Population: 109.5 million, Area: 55,598 square miles)*
■ Female life expectancy is 81 years.	■ Female life expectancy is 49 years.
■ One in 167 girls dies before her fifth birthday.	■ One in five girls dies before her fifth birthday.
■ One in 53 15-year olds will not survive her childbearing years. (One percent of these deaths relates to pregnancy and childbirth.)	■ One in six 15-year olds will not survive her childbearing years. (About one-third of these deaths relate to pregnancy and childbirth.)
■ Fewer than one percent of 15-19 year old women have already been married.	■ Almost 70 percent of 15-19 year old women have already been married.
■ Women bear one to two children on average.	■ Women bear five to six children on average.
■ Over three fourths of married women use contraception.	■ One fourth of married women use contraception.
■ Virtually all school-aged girls are in school.	■ One in three school-aged girls is in school.
■ Female university enrollment is 37 percent of women aged 20-24.	■ Female university enrollment is less than two percent of women aged 20-24.
■ About half the secondary school teachers are women.	■ One in 10 secondary school teachers is a women.
■ Three out of five women are in the paid labor force.	■ One in 15 women is in the paid labor force.
■ Two out of five women are professionals.	■ Only 3 out of 1,000 women are professionals.
■ Women live an average of seven years longer than men.	■ Women live an average of two years less than men.
■ Women and men have similar literacy rates.	■ Some 24 percent more women are illiterate than men.
■ About half of the paid workforce is female.	■ Only 14 percent of the paid workforce is female.
■ In 1988 women held 113 seats in Sweden's 349-member parliament.	■ In 1988 women held four seats in Bangladesh's 302-member parliament, out of 30 reserved for them.

Family size may also influence children's health status and the relative amount of care given little girls. In all countries mothers are important primary health care providers. In families where son preference is strong and there are many small children, little girls may lose out in the competition for their mother's scarce time. They may also get less to eat. In a significant number of countries, men and boys eat first; women and girls eat what is left. In poor families this may be very little. These patterns are reflected in differential life expectancy for men and women in some developing countries.

Female Mortality in the Childbearing Years

In the world's poorest countries women are up to 200 times more likely to die as a result of complications of pregnancy, abortion or childbirth as women in the richest countries. Since women in poor countries are also pregnant more often, maternal mortality often represents a major cause of death among women of childbearing age.

For women in rich countries, safe legal abortion and good obstetrical care have made maternal mortality a rarity. But worldwide, over half a million women still die every year because of inadequate reproductive health care. For every one woman who dies, an additional 10 to 15 are handicapped. Some 25 million women suffer serious complications in childbirth, such as hemorrhage and infection.

In over one fourth of the 99 countries studied, 1 in 10 women will die between age 15 and age 45. In Afghanistan, Benin, Cameroon, Malawi, Mali, Mozambique, Nepal, Nigeria and North Yemen, 1 in 5 will die. In countries with the lowest rates of adult female mortality only 1 out of 100 women will die during their childbearing years.

Gender Gap: Female and Male Life Expectancy

In Switzerland, females have an average life expectancy at birth of 82 years; in Canada, Hong Kong, Italy, Japan, the Netherlands, Norway and Sweden, at least 80 years. At the other end of the spectrum, women in Afghanistan have average life expectancies at birth of 41 years, and in Bangladesh, Malawi, Mali, Mozambique, Nepal, Nigeria and North Yemen, average life expectancy for women is below 50.

Men in very low income countries also have low life expectancy, but worldwide the gap between male and female life expectancy varies. In most highly industrialized countries, women's life expectancy is on average seven years longer than men's, but in most developing countries the gap narrows to two years, with the smallest differentials in Pakistan, India, Egypt, Haiti and Iraq. In Bangladesh and Nepal men have higher life expectancies than women. These statistics reflect in some cases patterns of discrimination which result in the relative neglect of female infants and children. In some South Asian countries, son preference is so strong that higher female infant and child mortality rates pervade even the middle and upper income strata.

Marriage and Children

Score	Country
20.0	Australia
20.0	New Zealand
19.5	Sweden
19.5	Taiwan
19.0	Belgium
19.0	Finland
19.0	Netherlands
19.0	Norway
19.0	United Kingdom
18.5	Canada
18.5	China
18.5	Czechoslovakia
18.5	Denmark
18.5	France
18.5	Germany, East
18.5	Germany, West
18.5	Switzerland
18.5	United States
18.0	Austria
18.0	Hong Kong
18.0	Hungary
18.0	Italy
18.0	Uruguay
18.0	USSR
17.5	Ireland
17.5	Israel
17.5	Singapore
17.0	Bulgaria
17.0	Cuba
17.0	Japan
17.0	Poland
17.0	Portugal
17.0	Spain
17.0	Yugoslavia
16.5	Argentina
16.5	Costa Rica
16.5	Panama
16.5	Romania
16.0	Barbados
16.0	Chile
16.0	Greece
16.0	Jamaica
16.0	Thailand
16.0	Trinidad & Tobago
15.5	Colombia
15.5	Guyana
15.5	Korea, South
15.5	Sri Lanka
15.0	Brazil
15.0	Dominican Republic
15.0	Malaysia
14.5	Philippines
14.5	Turkey
14.0	Mexico
14.0	Peru
14.0	South Africa
13.5	El Salvador
13.5	Venezuela
13.0	Ecuador
13.0	Paraguay
13.0	Tunisia
12.0	India
11.5	Bolivia
11.5	Botswana
11.5	Indonesia
11.0	Guatemala
11.0	Haiti
11.0	Honduras
11.0	Morocco
11.0	Pakistan
10.5	Mozambique
10.5	Nicaragua
10.5	Zimbabwe
10.0	Egypt
10.0	Kuwait
9.5	Algeria
9.5	Libya
9.5	Rwanda
9.5	United Arab Emirates
9.0	Liberia
9.0	Nepal
8.5	Iraq
8.5	Lesotho
8.5	Syria
8.5	Tanzania
8.5	Zambia
8.0	Cameroon
8.0	Jordan
8.0	Kenya
8.0	Senegal
7.5	Sudan
7.5	Yemen, North
7.0	Afghanistan
6.5	Benin
6.5	Malawi
5.5	Mali
5.5	Nigeria
4.5	Bangladesh
4.0	Saudi Arabia

Marriage and Children

Whatever else they are or aspire to be, most women in the world become wives and mothers. The age at which women marry and begin childbearing, the number of children they have, and their ability to control the timing of pregnancies through contraception, all have important links to their social status, health and economic well-being. Most of these relationships are mutually reinforcing.

In this study four variables were used to measure the status of women in the areas of marriage and childbearing. The principal data sources were the U.S. Bureau of the Census, the United Nations Statistical Office, the United Nations Population Division, and the Population Council.

- **Adolescent marriage** refers to the percent of women aged 15 to 19 who have been married.
- **Total fertility rate** refers to the average number of children a woman will have in her lifetime, based on current age-specific fertility rates.
- **Contraceptive prevalence** is the percentage of women married or living in union who are using contraception, including traditional methods.
- **Gender gap: widowed, divorced or separated** refers to the ratio of widowed, divorced or separated women to widowers and divorced or separated men. In every country, those households in which women are the sole source of support for themselves and their families tend to be at the bottom of the socio-economic ladder.

Early Marriage and Childbearing

In Denmark, Japan and Sweden only 1 in 100 women marry before the age of 20. In these countries and in much of the industrialized world most women finish secondary school before they marry, and a significant portion complete four years of university.

For women in the developing countries, the patterns of marriage and childbearing are strikingly different. More than two thirds of girls aged 19 and younger have already been married in Bangladesh and more than half in Afghanistan, Malawi, Mali, Nepal, North Yemen and the United Arab Emirates, some of them soon after reaching puberty. In the Middle East, South Asia and parts of Africa, arranged marriages are often between adolescent girls and considerably older men. Inequities in prestige, influence and autonomy increase with a large age difference between wives and husbands. In all those countries studied in which a third or more of women are married as adolescents, overall rankings for the countries on women's status fall in the lowest two categories: Very Poor or Extremely Poor.

In both developed and developing countries, early childbearing increases the chances of medical complications. Adolescent mothers may run double the risk of dying in childbirth as women in their early 20s. In both developed and developing countries too many women become mothers too soon for their own welfare and that of their children.

Number of Children and Contraceptive Use

Early marriage and childbearing are closely linked to high total fertility. In the countries studied where the majority of girls aged 15 to 19 have been married, women bear, on average, six or seven children, three or more times as many as women in countries with late marriage. In some countries with total fertility rates of six children or higher, access to contraceptive information and services is very limited, and less than two percent of married women practice family planning.

In many of the countries studied, age of marriage, contraceptive use and total fertility were closely linked with women's educational attainment and with paid employment in the modern sector. For example, in Canada and Finland where most women practice family planning, at least 50 percent of all adult women are in the formal paid labor force and at least 15 percent of them are in professional or managerial positions. In Mali and Afghanistan, countries with some of the highest total fertility levels and lowest contraceptive use levels, women have low levels of education and paid employment: one percent or less of women 15 years or older have paid jobs in the formal sector. Men in these countries account for 89 and 97 percent of all paid employees, respectively.

In many countries, early childbearing and subsequent unplanned pregnancies interfere with educational and employment opportunities in the modern sector. In most industrialized countries women can generally control the timing and number of their children through almost universal access to modern contraception and safe abortion. For 250 million women in less developed countries, however, most pregnancies are not planned and unplanned ones cannot be safely terminated.

A handful of developing countries in

Asia have very high rates of contraceptive use: 78 percent in Taiwan and 70 percent or higher in China, Hong Kong, Singapore and South Korea. These countries, not surprisingly, have low total fertility levels—one to three children per woman as well as low levels of adolescent marriage.

At the opposite extreme are a handful of African and conservative Islamic countries, such as Afghanistan, Cameroon, Iraq, Liberia, Malawi, Mali, Nigeria, North Yemen, Pakistan, Senegal, Sudan and Tanzania, where women marry early and bear five to seven children on average. In these countries less than 15 percent of married women use contraception.

Women Without Spouses

In all the countries studied, there were considerably more women who were widowed, divorced or separated than men. The differences between countries, however, were quite striking. In China, for example, there are 182 women in these categories for every 100 men in the same categories. In Bangladesh, with the lowest women's status ranking of any country in the study, there are 927 widowed, divorced or separated women for every 100 men in these categories.

In many countries these data may understate the extent of de facto women-headed households, especially where there is large scale out-migration of men seeking employment, as in the case of southern Africa. Good data on households where women are the sole providers are, unfortunately, unavailable for many countries. But estimates indicate that in Peru, Honduras, Venezuela and Cuba, one fifth of all urban and rural households are headed by women alone and that in parts of rural Kenya, Botswana and Ghana, women provide the sole support for two fifths of all households. For comparison, one sixth of the families in the United States is now headed by a non-married woman—a product of high divorce rates and an increasing number of births to unmarried teenagers. The bulk of U.S. welfare payments go to non-married female-headed households, one indication that the feminization of poverty is not confined to the world's poor countries.

Education

Score	Country
18.5	United States
18.0	Jamaica
17.5	Argentina
16.5	Canada
16.0	Finland
16.0	France
16.0	Norway
16.0	Venezuela
15.5	Belgium
15.5	Bulgaria
15.5	Denmark
15.5	Germany, East
15.5	Israel
15.5	Sweden
15.5	Taiwan
15.0	Australia
15.0	Ireland
15.0	Italy
14.5	Barbados
14.5	Hungary
14.5	New Zealand
14.5	Poland
14.5	Spain
14.0	Austria
14.0	Costa Rica
14.0	Germany, West
14.0	Jordan
14.0	Lesotho
14.0	Panama
14.0	Philippines
14.0	United Kingdom
14.0	Uruguay
14.0	Yugoslavia
13.5	Chile
13.5	Cuba
13.5	Czechoslovakia
13.5	Ecuador
13.5	Greece
13.5	Netherlands
13.5	Paraguay
13.5	Switzerland
13.0	Japan
13.0	Kuwait
13.0	Nicaragua
13.0	Portugal
13.0	Romania
12.5	Brazil
12.5	Colombia
12.5	Singapore
12.5	Trinidad & Tobago
12.5	United Arab Emirates
12.0	Hong Kong
12.0	Peru
12.0	South Africa
12.0	USSR
11.5	Botswana
11.5	Guyana
11.5	Korea, South
11.5	Mexico
11.0	Honduras
11.0	Thailand
10.0	Bolivia
10.0	Iraq
10.0	Malaysia
10.0	Sri Lanka
9.5	Algeria
9.5	Dominican Republic
9.5	Indonesia
9.5	Zimbabwe
9.0	El Salvador
8.5	Egypt
8.0	Kenya
8.0	Saudi Arabia
8.0	Zambia
7.5	Guatemala
7.0	China
7.0	Mozambique
7.0	Syria
7.0	Turkey
6.5	Nigeria
6.5	Tunisia
6.0	Cameroon
6.0	Haiti
6.0	India
6.0	Morocco
6.0	Tanzania
5.5	Afghanistan
5.5	Malawi
5.5	Rwanda
5.5	Sudan
5.0	Pakistan
4.5	Bangladesh
4.5	Liberia
4.5	Mali
4.5	Senegal
4.0	Libya
4.0	Nepal
3.0	Yemen, North
2.5	Benin

Education

Education is one of the greatest forces for change in women's lives. It is also one of the areas in which, universally, women have made the greatest recent gains. Even in the poorest countries, governments have made impressive investments in education over the last several decades.

Since education influences a woman's chances of paid employment, her earning power, her age at marriage, her control over childbearing, her exercise of legal and political rights, and even her ability to care for herself and her children, increased access to education is often the forerunner to a host of expanded opportunities for women. Although the gender gap is beginning to close, unfortunately men still have higher literacy rates than women, and boys still outnumber girls in school.

In this study, women's educational status is measured by four variables. The principal data sources were the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), the U.S. Bureau of the Census, the Population Council, and the World Bank.

- **Primary and secondary school enrollment** indicates the number of girls in primary and secondary school as a percentage of all girls of primary and secondary school age.
- **Women secondary school teachers** indicates the percentage of all secondary school teachers who are women. In countries scoring well on overall women's status about half of all secondary school teachers are women.
- **University enrollment** indicates the number of all women enrolled in a university as a percent of all women aged 20 to 24.
- **Gender gap: differential literacy for men and women** measures the gap between literacy rates for men and women aged 15 to 44 years, a gap which has largely closed in high and upper middle income countries.

Girls in School

Nearly all girls of school age are enrolled in primary or secondary school in North America, Australia, Japan and much of Western Europe, although in some countries, like the United States, secondary school dropout rates remain a problem. For other regions of the world, figures vary widely ranging from universal enrollment in Barbados to only 9 percent enrollment in Afghanistan. In Latin America female enrollment is generally 80 percent or above. In most Moslem countries enrollments are significantly lower—with a mere 46 percent of girls enrolled in oil-rich Saudi Arabia and only 17 percent in Pakistan.

Because of high birthrates and faltering economies, many of the poorest countries cannot keep up with their rapidly expanding school age popula-

tion. Where places in school are limited, girls are at a particular disadvantage, especially as the grade level increases. According to the United Nations, a third of all developing countries still do not have school systems adequate to educate all of their children.

The educational bias against girls observed in some countries and the lower earning power of adult women form a vicious circle. Parents may prefer to educate sons in part because their job prospects are better. Parents may also pull daughters out of school because girls are expected to help in the home. Even where daughters are allowed to stay in school, they may have less time to study than their brothers. Parents in some countries may also pull girls out of school when they reach puberty, either because they are considered ready for marriage or because parents want to ensure their chastity. Most countries still make inadequate efforts to get and keep girls in secondary schools.

Women as Teachers

In communities where many adults have little or no schooling, teachers are very important people. For girls in such communities female teachers are prime role models. According to UNESCO, the presence of female teachers may also have a salutary impact on female school enrollment.

The influence of female teachers is often limited, however, by their concentration in the lowest grades. Primary school teaching, with its low pay scales, has become an economic ghetto for women in some countries. A somewhat more useful indicator is women's representation at the secondary school level.

Women represent half or more of secondary school teachers in most highly industrialized countries and in some developing countries. In Argentina and Jamaica, for example, they constitute two thirds. (Interestingly, Jamaica is one of the minority of countries in the world where female literacy is higher than male.)

Proportions of female secondary school teachers are lowest in North Yemen (8 percent), Bangladesh and Nepal (9 percent), Haiti (12 percent), and Senegal (15 percent).

University Enrollment

In highly industrialized countries, a secondary school diploma is fast becoming a prerequisite for good jobs. For women, who are typically underrepresented in the better paid industrial jobs, university degrees are key to careers with mobility.

University education is not comparable from one country to another, nor are the requirements for secondary school graduation. Even with such differences, the United States and Canada with 59 and 46 percent female university enrollment, respectively, are standouts on the world scale. For European countries enrollment figures range from about 10 percent in Romania to 37 percent in Sweden; in Central and South America figures range from a high of 39 percent in Argentina to about 2 percent in Guatemala and Guyana. The 16 countries at the bottom of the scale, including 12 Sub-Saharan African countries, have female university enrollment rates of less than one percent. In these countries male enrollment rates are also extremely low.

The Gender Gap in Literacy

Adult literacy rates are largely a reflection of historical trends in primary school enrollment, although some countries such as China also have large adult literacy campaigns. The huge global expansion in school enrollment which peaked in the 1960s and 1970s has reduced the proportion of people unable to read and write to under 30 percent worldwide. Nevertheless, there are still many more illiterate women than illiterate men in most countries.

In over a fifth of the 99 countries studied, there are 25 to 50 percent more literate men than women, the largest gap being in Libya. Countries with large gender gaps in literacy include Benin, Syria, Tanzania and Turkey. Leaving aside the industrialized countries where literacy is almost universal, only six developing countries showed no appreciable difference between male and female literacy rates. In a few developing countries—Botswana, Lesotho and Jamaica—women's literacy was significantly higher than men's.

Employment

Women make up about a third of the world's official labor force—a ratio which has changed little over the last decade, despite the addition of over one hundred million female workers. Between 1985 and 2000 the total world population of working-age adults will have increased by almost 600 million. In most developing countries economic expansion has lagged well behind labor force growth, limiting opportunities for both men and women. With their greater mobility, easier access to credit and higher educational attainment, men have continued to maintain a big lead over women in employment.

Most official labor force statistics unfortunately underestimate women's economic participation, especially in poor rural countries where a large portion of the population is involved in subsistence agriculture. In Africa, for example, household-level surveys indicate women do three fourths of the farm work; in much of Asia they do about half. Some women are also involved in "micro-enterprises"—very small scale trading or production activities, often in the informal sector of the economy. These activities, like their unpaid agricultural labor, are usually under-reflected in government data.

There are, in fact, very few good international data sets on women's economic productivity or earning power which permit comparisons among a large number of countries. In this study women's participation in the formal economy was measured with four generally available sets of statistics. The principal data sources were the International Labour Office (ILO), the U.S. Bureau of the Census, the United Nations Statistical Office, and the Population Council.

- **Employed women** measures the number of women who are working for pay as a percentage of all adult women aged 15 years and over. In the industrialized countries, where virtually all households are part of the money economy, it is a good measure of women's economic participation, although not of their real earning power.
- **Self-employed women** measures the percent of women aged 15 or older who appear as self-employed in official statistics, whether they work in

Employment

Score	Country
14.5	Sweden
13.5	Germany, East
12.5	Mozambique
12.5	USSR
11.5	Barbados
11.5	Finland
11.0	Denmark
11.0	Norway
10.5	Bulgaria
10.0	Canada
10.0	Czechoslovakia
10.0	United States
9.5	Haiti
9.5	Jamaica
9.0	Australia
9.0	Hungary
8.5	Benin
8.5	Hong Kong
8.5	Poland
8.5	Trinidad & Tobago
8.5	United Kingdom
8.0	Germany, West
8.0	Israel
8.0	Peru
8.0	Portugal
8.0	Singapore
7.5	Austria
7.5	France
7.5	Italy
7.5	Japan
7.5	Nepal
7.5	Panama
7.5	Philippines
7.5	Switzerland
7.5	Tanzania
7.5	Uruguay
7.0	Belgium
7.0	Ireland
7.0	Korea, South
7.0	Netherlands
7.0	New Zealand
7.0	Thailand
6.5	Botswana
6.5	China
6.5	Dominican Republic
6.5	Romania
6.5	Taiwan
6.5	Venezuela
6.5	Yugoslavia
6.0	Argentina
6.0	Brazil
6.0	Costa Rica
6.0	Cuba
6.0	El Salvador
6.0	Indonesia
6.0	Kuwait
6.0	Malaysia
6.0	Nicaragua
6.0	South Africa
6.0	Sri Lanka
5.5	Chile
5.5	Greece
5.5	Kenya
5.5	Spain
5.0	Bolivia
5.0	Cameroon
5.0	Ecuador
5.0	Mexico
5.0	Nigeria
5.0	Rwanda
5.0	Zambia
4.5	Colombia
4.5	Guyana
4.5	India
4.5	Paraguay
4.0	Guatemala
4.0	Honduras
3.5	Senegal
3.5	Tunisia
3.5	Zimbabwe
3.0	Bangladesh
3.0	Egypt
3.0	Lesotho
3.0	Liberia
3.0	Morocco
3.0	Turkey
3.0	United Arab Emirates
2.5	Jordan
2.5	Malawi
2.5	Mali
2.5	Sudan
2.5	Syria
2.0	Afghanistan
2.0	Algeria
2.0	Iraq
2.0	Libya
2.0	Pakistan
2.0	Saudi Arabia
2.0	Yemen, North

agriculture, commerce, manufacturing or a profession and whether or not they hire employees. For some developing countries the measure may largely reflect the diligence with which governments have attempted to quantify women's work.

- **Professional women** measures the number of women in professional, technical, managerial and administrative occupations as a percent of all women aged 15 years and over.
- **Gender gap: women's share of paid employment** measures the percent of the official paid workforce that is female.

Women Paid Employees

The proportion of women who work for pay varies widely from country to country. In the United States, Canada, Northern Europe and much of Eastern Europe, the percentage of women in the official paid labor force is above 40 percent, while in most Arab countries it is below 8 percent. Variations worldwide reflect in part the level of a country's economic development (or more specifically the size of the organized sector), but also the influence of cultural and other barriers to women's paid employment.

Among the countries studied, the smallest percentages of women in the official paid labor force were generally found in Africa, the Middle East, and South Asia. Two percent or less of women were in the official paid labor force in Afghanistan, Cameroon, Liberia, Malawi, Mali, Nepal, North Yemen, Pakistan, Rwanda, Saudi Arabia and Sudan. In the least developed countries like Rwanda, with an annual per capita income of $290, the organized sector is still so small, the measure is largely irrelevant as an indicator of women's economic participation. Saudi Arabia's low female employment rate, on the other hand, reflects strong cultural barriers to women's employment. For contrast, over 60 percent of women are counted in the paid labor force in Sweden, East Germany and the Soviet Union.

Although cultural barriers to women's full-time paid work outside the home are lessening worldwide, almost everywhere women still have full responsibility for children and household chores, including in rural households care of small livestock and food production. In most countries changing economic realities are rapidly bringing women into the paid labor force, to help meet household expenses or, in a growing number of cases, because women are the sole source of support for their children.

For working women worldwide, the need to balance the demands of family and work limits women's economic competitiveness and burdens their daily lives. In both developed and developing countries working women can expect to have less free time than their husbands—time not only for rest and recreation but also for self-improvement or participation in community affairs.

A study of how rural Bangladeshi men and women spend their days showed that the average woman works 9 to 10 hours a day, while her husband works 7 to 8 hours. She spends 6 hours on agricultural work and on supplying the family with water and fuel. Her husband spends 3 to 4 hours. She spends 2 to 3 hours on child care, cooking and other household chores. He spends less than 5 minutes.

The fact that many women have little free time can be an important factor in efforts, for example, to improve adult female literacy through special classes, to reach groups of women farmers with agricultural training, or to make women full participants in local development projects that rely on volunteer labor from the community. Even when women are offered such opportunities, many cannot find time to participate.

Self-Employed Women

A large portion of women in the world are, in one way or another, self-employed, the majority as co-workers on small family farms. But because most official statistics count only the husband as a farmer, farm women are under-represented in government figures on self-employment. Two country exceptions are Tanzania and Nepal, where half of all adult women are counted as self-employed. Almost all of them are in agriculture, a pattern much more typical of most African and many Asian countries than indicated in national statistics.

In West Africa and sections of Latin America substantial numbers of women are also traders. Their activities help account for higher self-employment figures for Benin, Cameroon, Haiti, Nigeria, Peru and Rwanda, where about one fourth to one third of women are counted as self-employed.

Whether or not women as entrepreneurs are counted in official statistics may depend on the size of their business. Most are small, in part because barriers to credit for women (including their lack of title to property or other assets) keep them from getting sufficient working capital. With their time constraints and lower education levels, small businesswomen are also less likely than men

to negotiate all the bureaucratic red tape required to become officially licensed.

Professional Women

The proportion of women in professional positions tends to be one of the few widely available measures of women's comparative economic status, as it indicates to some degree earning power and prestige. The measure reflects both women's relative educational attainment and the types of studies they are offered or encouraged to pursue.

Women's lower educational attainments keep women's actual earnings lower than men's in every country. In Sweden, which tops the study's overall country rankings of women's status, women earn 9 Kroner for every 10 that men earn. In the Soviet Union women's earnings are about 75 percent of men's; in the United States, they are 68 percent of men's.

Much of the reason women earn less than men is because they do different work. The range of jobs open to women is narrower than for men. In virtually every economy "female ghettos" have developed where women predominate and where pay scales, fringe benefits, working conditions and mobility are poor. They include: in Egypt, harvesting cotton; in Sri Lanka, picking tea; in Portugal, domestic service; in Mexico, electronics assembly; and in the United Kingdom, secretarial work.

In all but 13 of the 99 countries studied, less than 10 percent of women are engaged in relatively well-paying professional, technical, managerial or administrative jobs. In about half the countries studied, the proportion is 3 percent or less. As in many other measures, Sweden topped the list: 42 out of 100 Swedish women are in professional positions.

Gender Gap: Women's Share of the Paid Labor Force

International Labour Office data show that women generally have the smallest share of the paid labor force in Latin America and the largest share in Eastern Europe. In most of the Latin American countries studied, less than a third of the official labor force is female, compared to almost half in some Eastern European countries studied. North American women also do well with a 45 percent share. In Asia, Africa and Western Europe roughly one in three workers are women. Women do well in Scandinavia, where they are just under 50 percent of the paid labor force, and in the newly-industrialized Asian countries. Women are almost 40 percent of the paid labor force in Singapore, South Korea and Hong Kong. In a few developing countries, like Mozambique, figures for women's employment share may be somewhat skewed by heavy outmigration of male workers to other countries.

Gender Gap Scores

Maximum Score – 25

12 Worst Scores		12 Best Scores	
Bangladesh	5.5	Finland	23.5
Saudi Arabia	6.5	Sweden	23.0
Egypt	7.5	USSR	23.0
Syria	8.5	Norway	22.0
Nigeria	8.5	USA	22.0
Libya	9.0	Australia	21.5
Pakistan	9.5	Bulgaria	21.5
Morocco	9.5	Canada	21.5
Yemen, North	10.0	Czechoslovakia	21.5
Sudan	10.0	Denmark	21.5
Mali	10.0	Germany, East	21.5
Kuwait	10.0	Hungary	21.5

Social Equality

Over the last several decades most countries have adopted laws or constitutional provisions designed to promote equality between men and women. They have included, for example, reforms of family law, equal pay and fair employment protections, and expanded political rights. The degree to which such new rights for women have a real impact on women's social and economic status varies widely and is probably best measured by hard data on gender gaps, such as paid labor force participation. On such measures many countries in the study with good laws get bad scores because governments lack the ability or will to enforce legal reforms.

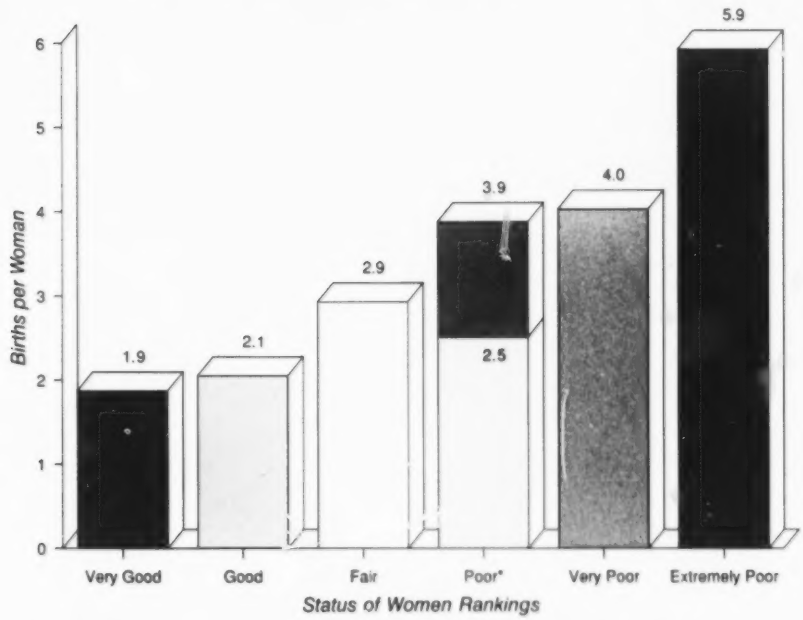
Such inconsistencies are one of the reasons that women's real equality under the law is more difficult to measure than almost any other aspect of women's status. In this study, three variables are used to compare women's social equality from country to country. The average of the three scores serves as the gender gap score. The principal data source for all scores is *The World Human Rights Guide* by Charles Humana, published by *The Economist*.

- **Political and legal equality** measures the degree to which women can expect legal protection against all types of discrimination based on sex and the degree to which they have and exercise political rights, including their representation in political office.
- **Economic equality** measures the degree to which women can expect equal treatment with male co-workers in their place of work and whether they are in other ways free to participate equally in economic life, including the right to own, manage and inherit real property.
- **Equality in marriage and the family** covers the right to enter freely into marriage, equal rights in divorce and other issues involving family law.

Political and Legal Equality

The *Economist* data for this variable suggest that only two countries, Finland and Sweden, have made an unqualified commitment to equal political rights for women and to legal protection against sex discrimination. Despite that

Births per Woman Compared to Status of Women



Births per Woman: Average number of children per woman (Total Fertility Rate).

** The inclusion of China, the largest nation in the world, with over half a billion women and low fertility (2.1 births per woman) brings down the total average in this category. The shaded area shows the increase in average births per woman when China is excluded from this group of countries.*

commitment women are still underrepresented in government: at present a third of Sweden's parliamentary seats are held by women. In the other countries studied, women's representation in the highest councils of government rarely exceeds 10 percent.

Two of the countries with the lowest scores for political and legal equality are Pakistan and Saudi Arabia—which were also at the bottom on other measures of women's social equality. In these countries, laws based on religious and cultural norms actually reinforce women's subordinate status in many aspects of life.

Economic Equality

Inequality in the workplace is present to some degree in every country. Turning legal guarantees of equality into economic reality requires conscious actions by governments and by employers, lenders and others with economic power. These include actions to lower the specific barriers which keep women from making their fullest contribution to economic life and actions to reward productivity fairly. About half of the countries studied (including all developed countries except Ireland and Japan) have made qualified efforts to equalize pay scales and benefits and to improve women's access to credit.

However, some of the countries which have outlawed economic discrimination against women have made exceptions for certain longstanding social practices. Kenya, for example, has exempted property inheritance from the equal rights provision in its constitution. In some Islamic countries daughters inherit half as much as sons. Similar customary practices in other countries limit women's right to own, manage or sell most types of income-producing property.

Women's economic equality is lowest in most of the very conservative Moslem countries, where in some cases the husband must consent to his wife's employment or authorize any commercial activity she undertakes.

Economic equality is greatest in Northern Europe where legal reforms are the most far-reaching and are generally enforced. However, no country did well. In the data from the *Economist* used for the study, 43 countries were considered to have made satisfactory attempts to eliminate economic discrimination, although breaches occurred. In no country did women have unqualified economic equality.

Equality in Marriage and the Family

In most Western industrial countries, women over the age of 18 are legally free to decide when and whom to marry. They also have an equal right with men to initiate divorce. When divorce or separation occurs, the law favors mothers in determining custody of children and attempts to provide women with a measure of economic security by requiring child support or a fair disposition of family property. Some 22 countries in the study fall into this category including Australia, Canada, Cuba, East and West Germany, Jamaica, Norway, the United States, and the U.S.S.R.

Such legal protections do not, of course, always guarantee married women's equality or security, as evidenced by the number of physically abused wives in Western countries and the number of displaced homemakers economically adrift. But they stand in sharp contrast to family law and its enforcement in many Asian, Middle Eastern and African countries, as well as some Latin American countries. In Brazil, for example, battered women have little legal recourse and husbands who murder their wives "to protect their honor" often do so with impunity. In much of Latin America many women live in consensual unions rather than legal marriages, and their rights to common property and economic support are ambiguous.

In some of the most conservative Islamic countries where the study's scores on marital equality are lowest, women are not autonomous individuals in the legal sense and must have a designated male "guardian" (usually a

father, brother or husband). Many Islamic countries also permit polygyny, although economic factors are helping to make the practice less common. Under conservative interpretations of Islam, women generally may not initiate divorce, but men may divorce their wives almost at will and typically retain custody of children.

Like most Latin American countries, many African and Asian countries, including many moderate Islamic countries, have made some attempt to modernize family law. But except where organized efforts have been made to teach women their rights and offer them legal counsel, reforms have had little impact on traditional practices. In India, for example, the official age of marriage for women was raised to 18 years in 1978 to discourage the arranged marriages of very young girls. Dowries have been specifically outlawed. But many rural Indian girls are still married at 14 or younger, and newspapers report continued incidents of bride-burning related to dowry disputes.

In a number of African countries women's advocates are fighting an uphill battle to eliminate clitoridectomy and other more extreme genital operations on young girls, generally referred to as female circumcision. Some defenders of the practice believe, among other reasons, that it is necessary to keep women chaste and faithful. In most conservative regions women without such operations are not considered marriageable.

In many of these same African, Asian and Middle-Eastern countries, women's inequality in marriage prevents them from exercising any independent control over when they will get pregnant or how many children they will have. They are not permitted, for instance, to use contraceptives without their husbands' permission. The inability to control childbearing can increase women's vulnerability and dependence in marriage, since even in countries with child support laws, many divorced or abandoned women have little or no income from former spouses.

Government efforts to craft and enforce new equal rights provisions have improved women's status in some instances. But in most societies ingrained inequalities and the attitudes behind them die hard.

Social Equality

Score	Country
18.5	Finland
18.5	Sweden
16.5	Australia
16.5	Austria
16.5	Belgium
16.5	Bulgaria
16.5	Canada
16.5	Cuba
16.5	Czechoslovakia
16.5	Denmark
16.5	Germany, East
16.5	Germany, West
16.5	Greece
16.5	Hungary
16.5	Jamaica
16.5	Netherlands
16.5	New Zealand
16.5	Norway
16.5	Poland
16.5	United States
16.5	USSR
16.5	Yugoslavia
14.5	Barbados
14.5	Costa Rica
14.5	Ecuador
14.5	El Salvador
14.5	France
14.5	Iraq
14.5	Italy
14.5	Mexico
14.5	Nicaragua
14.5	Portugal
14.5	Romania
14.5	Spain
14.5	Switzerland
14.5	Trinidad & Tobago
14.5	Turkey
14.5	United Kingdom
14.5	Venezuela
12.5	Algeria
12.5	Benin
12.5	Cameroon
12.5	China
12.5	Colombia
12.5	Dominican Republic
12.5	Guyana
12.5	Honduras
12.5	Hong Kong
12.5	Israel
12.5	Japan
12.5	Panama
12.5	Philippines
12.5	Sri Lanka
12.5	Uruguay
10.5	Argentina
10.5	Bolivia
10.5	Botswana
10.5	Guatemala
10.5	India
10.5	Jordan
10.5	Kenya
10.5	Korea, South
10.5	Malawi
10.5	Malaysia
10.5	Nepal
10.5	Paraguay
10.5	Peru
10.5	Rwanda
10.5	Singapore
10.5	Tunisia
10.5	Zambia
10.5	Zimbabwe
8.0	Afghanistan
8.0	Haiti
8.0	Indonesia
8.0	Ireland
8.0	Lesotho
8.0	Liberia
8.0	Mali
8.0	Mozambique
8.0	Senegal
8.0	Syria
8.0	Taiwan
8.0	Tanzania
8.0	Thailand
8.0	Yemen, North
6.0	Brazil
6.0	Chile
6.0	Egypt
6.0	Libya
6.0	Morocco
6.0	Nigeria
6.0	South Africa
6.0	Sudan
4.0	Bangladesh
4.0	Kuwait
2.0	Pakistan
2.0	Saudi Arabia
2.0	United Arab Emirates

Data Problems

Better data on women, including new statistical indicators, are prerequisites for sound strategies to improve the status of women.

The final report of the 1985 World Conference to Review and Appraise the Achievements of the United Nations Decade for Women specifically recommends "further investment in evolving adequate gender-specific data."

Many problems were encountered in assembling the data for "Country Rankings of the Status of Women." Although countries in the study contain 92 percent of the world's female population, a number of important countries, including Iran, Vietnam, North Korea and many African countries, had to be excluded because of the absence of data for a significant number of indicators or because available data were too old to be useful.

The quantity and quality of published data also varied widely among the five sectors covered. Sex-specific data on health, education and reproductive behavior were relatively complete and current. But reliable measures of women's economic status were generally lacking. Assessments of women's legal and *de facto* equality with men were sparse and less rigorous.

Despite these difficulties, nearly 85 percent of the 1,980 indicators used in "Country Rankings of the Status of Women" are based on post-1980 data compiled by organizations such as UNESCO, ILO and the U.S. Bureau of the Census.

Outlook

Women's struggle for equal status takes many different forms in different parts of the world. But at the most basic level, the aspirations of women in one country are not unique from those of women in any other country: equality under the law; improved health and education; control over childbearing; and access to the full range of opportunities to explore individual potential.

In terms of government and other interventions to help women, these basic aspirations translate into such things as: legal reforms to allow women control over real property; safer childbirth and unrestricted access to safe and effective birth control; more equal opportunities for education and training, particularly at the secondary and vocational level; more opportunities to use these acquired skills through access to a wider choice of jobs; better access to financial credit; and measures that will relieve them of some of the burdens of their double day.

Then and only then will women be able, as the Chinese say, "to hold up their half of the sky."

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Population Crisis Committee
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